

Behind the Scenes

By Bill Holland

Jim and J.C. Beattie

Jim, son J.C. and the ATI Challenger



■ Father and son collaborations are not exactly unique in motorsports. There are many fine examples of racers and/or speed parts manufacturers whose offspring literally grew up in the sport and have embarked on a similar career. One prime example is ATI founder Jim Beattie Sr. and his son J.C.

Fifty years ago Beattie bought a transmission shop in the Baltimore suburb of Silver Springs, Maryland, and began specializing in performance applications. Many of the automatic transmissions used in drag racing today trace their roots to the '60s, where pioneers like Beattie poured their heart and soul into improving the performance and reliability of Powerglides, Turbos, Torqueflites and the rest.

By 1970 Beattie was deeply involved in drag racing and developed the Trick Loc trans brake for the TH-400. This set the stage for many important innovations and some 10 patents with four currently pending.

In 1974 Beattie promoted ATI by campaigning the ATI Black Magic nitro fuel Funny Car. Its distinctive Kenny Youngblood paint design and lettering helped the Vega garner Best Appearing Car honors at its debut. The car was one of the era's most dominant, winning the NHRA Summernationals in Englishtown, New Jersey, with Al Segrini at the helm. The Black Magic's win in its rookie season was one for the record books. The

following year Jim added a Black Stang Mustang driven by veteran Pee Wee Wallace to the ATI stable.

With an ever-increasing emphasis on the product side of the business, in the late '70s Beattie incorporated the company as ATI Racing Transmissions, Inc. and moved to its current location on Whitestone Road in Baltimore. The facility has expanded significantly throughout the years.

In 1986, the 25th anniversary of ATI, Beattie introduced the Super Damper, a unique (and patented) harmonic control device that has since become the balancer of choice for an overwhelming majority of racers and engine builders, including NASCAR and many other forms of motorsports.

Beattie has always been deeply involved with manufacturing technology, and he even developed state-of-the-art equipment for building torque converters. His patented CW3 system was introduced in 1988 and has subsequently been employed by transmission shops the world over as well as by many of his competitors.

Up until 1993 most converter builders used 8-inch Opel cores typically found in junk yards as the foundation for their racing units. Unhappy with the quality of these used cores, ATI purchased the original Opel tooling from General Motors (France), revised it and became the first (and only) independent company to build racing converters from scratch.

J.C. Beattie Jr. was born with racer's blood coursing through his veins. He started in go-karts, ultimately winning almost 40 World Karting Association national events, the WKA's Triple Crown and four championships by 1996.

He attended the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, earning a degree in Business Management (with a healthy dose of Mechanical

Engineering). Being in the heart of NASCAR country proved to be a strong lure, and J.C. was drawn into oval track competition. He competed in the Parts Pro Truck Series in 1998-99, finishing third in points. From 2000-04 he raced stock cars on the ASA circuit.

After joining ATI full-time in 2003, J.C. immersed himself in the family business. This led to involvement with many NASCAR race teams testing dampers and ultimately obtaining a ride of his own in the form of an A/Stock Automatic Dodge Drag Pak Challenger. In his brief drag career, J.C. has won several NHRA class titles as well as the NMCA Hemi Shoot-Out at Maple Grove. More importantly, the Challenger has been a rolling test bed for a number of Chrysler-based ATI products, as well as the new Super F synthetic ATF that is a collaborative effort with Joe Gibbs' Driven and has become immensely popular in a very short time.

Today, after 50 years in business, ATI remains a family-owned and operated enterprise. Jim and J.C. remain full-throttle in their quest to develop new and improved transmission components, while other family members are involved with the company operations and marketing. All the Beatties share a deep-rooted passion for the U.S.A. and are justifiably proud of ATI's ability to manufacture everything in-house, employing a cadre of experienced and dedicated technicians, which enables them to put "Made in U.S.A." on every product. **DR**

